

ARC on the Move

Story by SFC Lisa Beth Snyder

SOLDIERS are not the only people whose jobs require them to deploy to hot spots on short notice.

Members of the American Red Cross Armed Forces Emergency Service mobile staff must be prepared to don their BDUs and deploy with the U.S. military anywhere in the world with five days notice, said Carolyn Seldon, senior associate of deployments for the Armed Forces Emergency Service and a former mobile staff member.

"I didn't join the military, so this was my way of serving my country," Seldon said.

In December 2001, the Red Cross sent two mobile staff members to set up operations in Uzbekistan.

Terry Hitchcock, station manager in Kitzingen, Germany, and Wilfredo Solis, station manager at Holloman Air Force Base, N.M., traveled to AFES headquarters in Falls Church, Va., for briefings before receiving individual replacement training at Fort Benning, Ga., and then heading to central Asia.

"If you're in AFES and you don't like to deploy, you're in the wrong service," said Hitchcock, who is on his sixth deployment in 31 years.

Hitchcock was also the first AFES member to arrive in theater during

Desert Shield.

The American Red Cross is the only member of the International Committee of Red Cross and Red Crescent that sends workers on deployments with its country's military, said Sue A. Richter, AFES vice president.

"I'm doing something positive for our military so they know that someone is there," said Solis, who was a graves registration specialist in the Army Reserve for 13 years.

"This will be a unique experience, again wearing the uniform, but in another area," Solis said. "We're going to be the link between service mem-

A sailor kisses his wife and infant son goodbye as Red Cross mobile staff members wait nearby with other family members.

Daniel Cima, ARC

bers and families."

Seldon said the deployments section picks its members, selecting those with varying experience levels and different cultural backgrounds.

Wearing the red and white Red Cross patch on their BDU sleeves doesn't protect the mobile staff members from harm. To reduce the risk of injuries, the Red Cross staffers are trained how to wear the Kevlar helmet, flak vest and protective mask, and learn such basic military survival skills as how to react to hostile fire.

"We know the

risks," Hitchcock said. "When the military requests our services they do so with our security in mind."

While Hitchcock was deployed to Somalia, the building he lived and worked in was attacked. A sergeant major in a room down the hall came running to make sure he was safe. Hitchcock said he had on his Kevlar helmet and flak vest and had taken cover.

"I never even thought about the risk," said Barbara Green, station manager at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., about her deployments. "I was on this big adventure."

Claudette Johnson, an associate in deployments, echoed Green's sentiments. She said that just as the Red Cross staff looks out for the soldiers well-being, the soldiers watch out for the Red Cross staff.

The military community also takes

care of the mobile staff's family, just as it would any other deployed person's family, she said.

Green said that the military staff is just as proud of the Red Cross worker deploying as they are of the soldiers. □



Wilfredo Solis and Terry Hitchcock, members of the American Red Cross Armed Forces Emergency Service mobile staff, take a break during processing at Fort Benning, Ga., before deploying to Uzbekistan.



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Posters on the door of the Armed Forces Emergency Service Center in Falls Church, Va., list the names of the agency's staff members who have gone to support military members.

SFC Lisa Beth Snyder



Red Cross mobile staff members must be prepared to don their BDUs and deploy with the U.S. military anywhere in the world with five days notice. Once in the field, they share the same living conditions and potential hazards as the soldiers with whom they deploy.

(ARC photos)



Keeping Families Informed

Story and Photos by
SFC Lisa Beth Snyder

WHILE soldiers are assigned or deployed around the world, the circle of life continues for their families back home.

The American Red Cross Armed Forces Emergency Service has been keeping soldiers informed about births and deaths officially for the last 97 years, and unofficially for 104 years, said Sue A. Richter, AFES vice president.

In 1905, Congress gave the American Red Cross the job of keeping military personnel informed about their families back home, a task American Red Cross founder Clara Barton had been performing since her pre-Red Cross days during the Civil War, said Rick Davis, director of AFES Systems.

During the Spanish-American War,



An American Red Cross volunteer serves water to a wounded British soldier at a railway station in France in May 1913.

Barton, then head of the American Red Cross, used the military's telegraphs to send messages home for soldiers, though the organization's mission during that conflict was to provide nursing.

Now, the Red Cross verifies and clarifies messages at its two service centers and at local chapters, including 48 on military installations, Davis said.

The two service centers, one at Fort Sill, Okla., and the other in Falls Church, Va., input data into a data base that's accessible to Red Cross chapters around the world, he said.

Barbara Green, station manager of the Red Cross office at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, said that being able to access the data base of cases allows her to get information directly from the staff at the message's destination.

AFES centers are also able to access military personnel data to help locate service members, said Jesse W. Cowart, manager of the Falls Church center.

To help military personnel keep their families informed of their whereabouts, the Red Cross provides letters with blank spaces that soldiers can fill out with such information as



Soldiers donate to the American Red Cross before embarking on a Europe-bound troopship in February 1944.

their unit and social security number. They can then mail the letters home free of charge, Cowart said.

Because emergency-service representatives have access to personnel data and also receive messages from classified locations, each of the center's representatives must have a secret clearance, he said.

Most of the more than 400 calls per day the centers receive concern deaths, injuries or births, Cowart said. The centers also handle 1,200 e-mails per month from Red Cross offices. After the Sept. 11 terrorist attack, however, the number of health-and-welfare calls

increased as soldiers were called up, Cowart said.

Overseas, the emergency-service centers also deliver messages for government employees, contractors and teachers.

AFES is the highest-rated Red Cross customer service, Cowart said. □



The Armed Forces Emergency Service Center in Falls Church passes vital information to service members.

Know Them Before You Need Them

Story by SFC Lisa Beth Snyder

EVERYONE needs a close relative that is just a phone call away.

The American Red Cross wants members of the military family to consider their local Red Cross chapters

to be that close relative, even when they're stationed away from major military installations, said Herbert L. Lawrence, director of community support for the American Red Cross Armed Forces Emergency Service.

Through its "Get to Know Us Before You Need Us" program, more than 1,000 Red Cross chapters in the United States and its territories have been seeking out "hidden" military members and their families, he said. They include National Guard members and Reservists, recruiters, ROTC cadets, members

of Military Entrance Processing Station units and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers personnel.

Also, because Red Cross support doesn't end when soldiers retire or leave the service, the Red Cross is one of the community organizations that work with Department of Veterans Affairs to help veterans with VA claims, Lawrence said.

AFES guides local Red Cross chapters on how to work with military units so that when service members are called up for deployment they and their families already know their local Red Cross chapter members and the services they offer. In turn, the Red

Cross chapter knows what the military members and their families need from the community, Lawrence said.

He added that at least three-quarters of the chapters with military members in their communities have regular contact with those members or their families.

Regular contact with its local military community, gave one chapter the idea to set up a program to recruit lawyers in the community to provide wills and powers of attorney for a deploying unit that was located away from its staff judge advocate. This enabled the soldiers to have the necessary legal documents before they left their families.

Local Red Cross chapters also help military families that need the assistance of their military aid society, such as Army Emergency Relief. Red Cross chapters will advance soldiers AER funds upon approval by AER staff, Lawrence said.

The Red Cross also works with U.S. Army Reserve Command and its family support group to ensure the message about Red Cross services is getting out to soldiers and their families, he said.

Contacting the Red Cross is an item on checklists in the Guard and Reserve Family Readiness Programs Toolkit available at www.defenselink.mil/ra/family/toolkit. □



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